

## Falling by orphan\_account

**Series:** [i can't live without you, darling](#) [2]

**Category:** Stranger Things - Fandom

**Genre:** Angst, F/F, F/M, Future, Grown Up, Happy Ending, Sequel, Slow Burn, Toxic Relationship, every chapter title is the title of a song

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Jane Hopper, Jim Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Max Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Will Byers

**Relationships:** LucasxMax, elevenxoc, mikexelevan - Relationship, mikexoc, nancyxjonathan

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2020-11-15

**Updated:** 2021-03-21

**Packaged:** 2022-04-01 13:33:53

**Rating:** Mature

**Warnings:** Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Rape/Non-Con

**Chapters:** 12

**Words:** 14,997

**Publisher:** [archiveofourown.org](#)

**Summary:**

" what if i'm down what if i'm out what if i'm someone you won't talk about "

mike and el have been separated for years, but what happens when they reunite again?

sequel to cherry wine.

warning: this book deals with domestic abuse, depression, and sexual assault. If you are sensitive to any of this, please tread lightly.

## 1. and we're back

hello everyone! we're back!

i'm so excited to get started on the sequel to cherry wine. i promise it's gonna be a lot better than it's predecessor. there will be 24 chapters and i will hopefully be publishing every other sunday. there may be days i don't post, but that's because i'm still working on this book.

each chapter title is a song and there will be lyrics from said song at the beginning of the chapter as a description of what the chapter will be about. there will also be the song title and artist at the end of each chapter to pay tribute to them. it's going to be much more angst than the last one and it's going to carry a lot more weight. this book deals with issues such as domestic abuse, depression, and sexual assault, so if you get easily triggered by that kind of stuff i suggest you skip out on this one.

there is a playlist on Spotify called "falling chapter songs" under the user panik. if you want to find all of the songs in this book in one place, check that out. i'll update the playlist every time i update the book.

that being said, i'll stop wasting time and we can jump right in.

## 2. she

### Summary for the Chapter:

Lives for the memory  
A woman who's just in his head  
And she sleeps in his bed  
While he plays pretend  
So pretend

July 19, 1992  
Indianapolis, Indiana  
12:14 pm

El was sitting at home, waiting for Jason to come back. He had gone out to the store for some milk about two hours ago and he still hadn't returned. And El was starting to get worried.

Her knee tapped, making a small sound on the hardwood floor Jason would have yelled at her for. She stopped abruptly as if he would somehow hear it and come racing to get her in trouble.

She got up from where she was perched on the couch and walked over to the phone. It rang and rang, each time it went off, El's heartbeat increasing. No one ever picked up.

She didn't know what to do next, so she called someone who probably did. They answered the phone with a harsh, "What?"

"Dad, it's El, Jason went to the store to get some milk about two hours ago but he hasn't come back yet. I called his car phone and no one answered. I also called the store but they said he wasn't there. I just don't know what to do."

Hopper sighed, "Okay why don't you just wait a little longer and if he still hasn't come home try calling his car phone again."

"And if he doesn't answer the car phone?" She questioned.

"All there is to do is wait. If he hasn't come home by tomorrow night, go to the police station and file a missing person report," Hopper told

her.

"Okay. I love you. Thanks for the help. Bye," She said.

"Love you too, Ellie. I hope he comes home. Bye-bye." The line went dead and El stood in their small apartment alone.

Maybe it was good he wasn't coming home. She could have some quiet time by herself, which she never got. In plus, Jason was a smart guy, nothing bad had happened to him.

She shook her head violently, of course, it was bad he was missing. She was so stupid sometimes, she was surprised she was even with someone like Jason.

She plopped down on the couch and flipped on the TV. Thirty minutes soon passed and she got up from her seat. Again no one answered the phone. She told herself he was okay though. Nothing had happened.

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1:43 am

Eleven was in their bedroom watching television when she heard a commotion in the kitchen.

Her heart sped up, she contemplated calling her dad but decided against it because of the time. He was in Hawkins anyways so what good would that do, Hawkins being a good thirty minutes away from Indianapolis.

She grabbed the baseball bat next to the bed and opened the door quietly.

Her heart raced and mind ran. Who could be in the house? Could it be *Him*? No of course not, that would be stupid. Whoever it was, she knew she could beat the shit out of them, but that didn't mean she wasn't scared.

She crept down the hallway toward the small kitchen, the soft glow from the window lighting the way. She braced herself for combat (in hindsight maybe she *should* have called her dad) and stepped into the

room.

Bat swinging and eyes closed, she struck something. She heard a man's voice yell, "Jane! What the hell are you doing?" She opened her eyes to see Jason. His arms crossed and brows furrowed. She knew she was in trouble when she saw the item she had hit was the tiny wooden table Jason's mother had given them when they moved in together.

"I thought someone was in the apartment!" She stepped back as he took a long stride toward her. "And where have you been?"

"That's not important," he said. He was close now, probably two inches from her. And she found herself wishing she could move further into the wall. His breath tumbled out of his mouth in hot, rancid strokes.

"You're drunk," El said quietly, smelling the alcohol on his tongue.

"So?"

"You said you would stop drinking as much. We had a conversation about this, Jason. It's becoming a problem."

"Oh fuck you." He said, moving closer, if that was even possible, now his heavy body was pressed against hers. "I wanted a drink. You're not in charge of me."

"I was worried about you. Why didn't you call me?" She looked down at her feet as she asked this. Jason was, to say, hard to deal with, even when he wasn't drunk. The slightest slip up could send him into a flying rage. And a flying rage is not something you would want from him.

"Listen, Jane. I don't know who you think you are but you're not in control of everything I do. I don't have to run everything by you before I do it. Do you understand that? Did I put it simple enough?" He spoke in a calm voice that said "You're inferior to me so I have to dumb everything down to your level" and it infuriated to El.

"Please don't talk to me like that," She said, almost inaudibly.

"What did you just say? I can talk to you, however, the damn well I please! Don't talk to me like that," He said in a mocking voice, "Who do you think you are? I am in charge of you, I always have and I always will be and there will be nothing you can do to change that!"

"I'm sorry, okay! I was just worried about you! I thought something bad had happened. I thought you were hurt! I'm sorry for caring!" She yelled, not thinking about what was coming out of her mouth. His eyes widened and face reddened. He raised a clenched fist. She saw the strong hand coming down toward her face.

She ducked and scrambled away from him on her hands and knees. She heard a loud thud and a yell, "Jane!" Jason screamed, "I'm gonna fucking kill you! Get back here, I'm gonna fucking kill you!"

"No!" She wretched and cried, losing energy fast. She had soon backed herself in a corner as Jason ran toward her. He reached her quickly, grabbing her by the hair. He dragged her into their bedroom and told her, "We're gonna fuck now, okay Janie?" He whispered in her ear.

"No," She said quietly.

He didn't listen though. She didn't think about the sex when it happened, all she could think about was how bad her head hurt. He had dragged her from the living room to their room from her hair. It hurt so bad.

After it was over, he fell asleep with his pants still at his ankles and she got up out of the bed and walked to the restroom. Crying, she picked up the scissors Jason used to trim his beard.

As she carved into her arms, her cries grew into sobs and by the time she was done she was dry heaving into the toilet.

That night El fell asleep on the cold floor, blood pooled around her. Her pounding head resting on the sticky tile.

She fell asleep with one thought. One thought directed at two very different people. One of them wanted her heart and one of them had it. One thought for both of them.

*You ripped my heart out.*

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***She***

***Harry Styles***

### 3. from the dining table

*We haven't spoke since you went away*

*Comfortable silence is so overrated*

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July 13, 1992

Boston, Massachusetts

1:26 am

Mike stumbled into his apartment, "Shhh. My landlord is a bitch and hates people having fun." He whispered.

Giggles filled the small place as the two people made their way down the hallway, bumping into chairs and tables as they went.

Finally making it to the bedroom, they tumbled onto the bed. The mystery girl (mike had forgotten her name) straddled him. She leaned down and kissed him roughly on the neck. Mike laid back and sighed. Every night was the same, he went to the bar, got drunk, and took a girl home. More often than not she would be gone in the morning. He missed when sex was more than just bodily pleasing. He missed it when it meant something.

As they did it, he thought about her. Every night he thought about her. How she always cared and loved him and how she was the only person to ever make him feel something.



He just felt numb. It was like those 353 days but a million times worse. It was worse because he knew she was out there somewhere living a life without him in it. He knew where she was and how to get to her and she knew where he was and how to get to him but neither of them actually went to the other. It was like they just decided to act like the other didn't exist. Like they were never a part of the others' life.

If only he could just grow a pair and go back to indiana, not even see her, just to see his mom. He hadn't been over there since high school, always making her fly out to Boston. He was just so scared of remembering. remembering the smells, and the touches, and the looks. remembering how it felt to fall in love. He knew if he went back to Hawkins, he would remember everything that happened all those years ago. Maybe he would see hopper, or the school, or maybe even just his childhood home would make him snap back to when he was 12 again.

It was stupid that he was scared to go back there because he had plans to move there. He always knew after he graduated he wanted to go back to Hawkins, and now that he was graduated he could.

when they finished, the girl left him to wallow. he used to be able to smell el on his clothes, but now they reeked of loneliness. he would always be longing for her when she wasn't with him. he wished he could remember what her voice sounded like. he could hardly remember anything about her except those honey brown eyes that melted his heart and the way she made him feel like he was worth something.

when they were together... *fire* . she lit him up inside. she made

him shine like he never had before, but now that they weren't together, he was a quiet shell of the person he once was. he no longer burned with the passion only one that knows love has. he was a doused flame.

the soft of the bed felt like a hammer in his back without her there. it was hot and he could feel himself sinking into the black hole so many find themselves trapped in. the funny thing was, he didn't care. *let me sink. there's nothing here for me, anyways.*

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**from the dining table**

**harry styles**

#### 4. ARE WE STILL FRIENDS?

*don't get green skin keep contact*

*don't say "goodbye smell you later"*

*i don't wanna end this season on a bad episode*

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July 27, 1992

Hawkins, Indiana

9:13 am

Nerves are something we've all experienced at one point or another. Maybe you were waiting to see what grade you got, or made the big role in the school play. The point is, nerves are nothing new. So when Max woke up, she had more than expected to feel nervous, but the amount of nervousness she had overpowered her completely.

"Max, are you excited?" El asked, as they struggled to get her hair to stay up.

"I feel like I'm having a heart attack," Max said, clutching her chest.

Singsong laughter ran throughout the apartment. Today was the day! Max was getting married! El, of course, was her maid of honor. Her bridesmaids were Nancy and a girl she met from college named Liv.

“Aw, Max, you look so beautiful,” Liv gushed.

“Oh, Shut up, I haven’t even gotten my makeup done yet.”

“That doesn’t matter,” Liv smiled. “Lucas better get used to you not wearing makeup.”

“You forget, we *are* living together.”

Their conversation was interrupted by a knock on the door, “Oh, that must be the makeup artist!”

Max’s makeup was quickly finished, and she went to change into her dress, “Oh Max, you look so pretty. Lucas is so lucky.” Nancy smiled.

“Thanks Nance. Oh my god, I’m actually getting married. I never thought this would really happen.”

“Oh Max, don’t cry. You’ll ruin your makeup.”

“I know, I know. It’s just so surreal,” She said, wiping her eyes.

“We get it. It’s gonna be great. Now let’s go get married!” El yelled.

“Come on, Lucas. You look great.” Mike said.

“Everything needs to be perfect. She did almost everything, the least I can do is look good,” Lucas said while tightening his tie.

“She’ll be happy if you just show,” Dustin muttered.

The four men erupted in laughter, “Okay, if we want to get there in time, we need to leave right now.” Mike said, pointing to his watch.”

“Thanks, best man.”

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“Okay, now who you’re walking with,” Max pointed to Nancy, “You’re gonna walk with Dustin, Liv, you’re gonna walk with Will. El, please don’t freak out, but Lucas’s best man is Mike Wheeler.”

El’s eyes widened, “Mike Wheeler as in my ex boyfriend Mike Wheeler?” Max closed her eyes and nodded, “Oh my fucking god Max, I haven’t seen him in four years!”

“I know, and I’m sorry, but we’ve been planning this wedding for two years and this was really important to Lucas.”

“Yeah, it’s fine. This is your wedding. And speaking of procession, we have a surprise for you. Come on out Sam!” El yelled.

An older man in a dark grey suit and a red tie stepped out from behind a curtain. Max let out a squeak and ran over to him, "Dad." She whispered, "I can't believe you came."

"I couldn't miss your wedding, and your friend here is very hard to say no to. Oh, Maxie, look at you. All grown up now. You're so beautiful," He said, looking her up and down.

"I've missed you so much, Dad."

"I've missed you too, baby."

Max felt a tap on her shoulder and emerged from her father's warm embrace, "Sorry to interrupt, but the weddings kind of starting." El said quietly.

"Okay, go get in your places," Max urged, "And El, good luck with Mike."

El smiled and thanked her and the girls rushed out of the room.

Mike and El made immediate eye contact. She walked over to him, her lavender dress flowing in the wind, "Hey" She said, almost whispering.

"Hey," He looked down at his polished black dress shoes. They seemed like the only thing he could focus on, except her face of course, but he feared he would get lost in the beauty of it all and embarrass himself, "Been a while."

"Yeah. It's been, what, four years?"

"Yep. You look really pretty," She blushed and giggled. That small laugh. Music to his ears. She was so gorgeous, it was ridiculous.

"Okay everyone, get in your places," The wedding planner said loudly.

First out were Max's grandparents, then Lucas's grandma. Next we're Lucas's parents, and Max's mom. Then Lucas was up, "Good luck, Lucas. It'll be great. I promise." Mike whispered to him. Lucas gave him a small thumbs up and he was gone.

"I can't believe they're actually getting married," El whispered.

"I know. It seems like just yesterday they were bickering about how hot Phoebe Kate's was," Mike said.

They all laughed and Dustin and Nancy were off. Then Liv and Will. El took a deep breath and grabbed Mike's arm, "You ready?" He asked.

"Fuck yeah."

It seemed like ages until they reached the end of the aisle, but there they were, watching the petals Nancy's daughter tossed float to the floor. And then Max. The soft light of the sun danced off the sequins on her dress causing them to glimmer, "Oh wow," Lucas whispered. The dress Max had picked out was made of a sheer material adorned with sequins and lace. The sleeves, made entirely of lace, dropped off the shoulders and reached to her forearms. The skirt fanned out into a bell shape and barely touched the floor so you could just see the tips of her white heels.

She reached Lucas, hugged her dad, and then... they were married, "I

believe you have prepared your own vows?" The officiant said. Max nodded and took out a small piece of paper.

"Lucas, we met when we were thirteen years old. I was such an asshole to you but you stuck around. You didn't know what you were doing or how to do it, but somehow we're here, now, getting married. I never thought when we were fourteen and arguing constantly that this blockhead would be my husband. I love you so much. Every day is like an adventure with you, and I want to see where this adventure takes us," A single tear ran down Lucas's face as he started.

"Max. Maxine Mayfield. You are the best thing that's ever happened to me. You called me a stalker but that didn't deter me from wanting to learn everything about you. You were the mystery that I needed to solve. Then I got to know you and I figured out that you're way better than I could've ever imagined. You're smart, funny, and so so pretty. I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you."

"Do you, Lucas Sinclair, take Maxine Mayfield to be your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, as long as you both shall live?"

"I do."

"And do you, Maxine Mayfield, take Lucas Sinclair to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, as long as you both shall live?"

"I do."

"I now pronounce you husband and wife, you may kiss the bride."

The applause was wild. There were whoops and hollers and whistles. Their families hugged and congratulated them and Max and Lucas's hands were clasped together the whole time.

Later they would say it was magical and there was no other feeling like it. They were right.



"So, what a wedding," Mike said.

"Yeah, I know. It's crazy that the person you date when you're fourteen could be your future husband," El laughed.

At that moment he suddenly remembered everything. Every joke, every cry, every time he snuck through her window late at night and snuck back out before Hopper woke. He remembered every kiss and every fight. And it really was crazy how much you could love someone at 12, 13, 14, 22. Crazy.

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**ARE WE STILL FRIENDS?**

**tyler, the creator**

## 5. woman

*I'm selfish, I know*

*But I don't ever want to see you with him*

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August 4, 1992

Hawkins, Indiana

7:22 pm

"Everything needs to be perfect," El yelled at Max from across the apartment. Max and Lucas had come back from their honeymoon just a couple of days ago, and Max, being in the spirit of love, had decided that it was time for the party to meet El's boyfriend.

"It's gonna be great, El," Max replied, "Is he hot? Does he have good manners? Dustin is very judgy."

"Yes and yes. I quizzed him all night on how to act. He's gonna be awesome," El said as she sat out napkins.

In reality, what happened the night before was not as glamorous. He made her dinner, like he usually did, and they watched family feud until her eyes couldn't hold themselves open anymore. He carried her to bed and she thought it would be a good night. A night where he was himself instead of the monster who overtook him when she did something to upset him, "Good night, love."

"Wait, can we go over what to do tomorrow?" That's where she went wrong.

"What do you mean? I know what to do."

"I just mean like some conversation points," She said timidly.

"I don't need conversation points, Jane. I know how to talk."

"I just meant-"

"Shut up. I know how to talk!" He interrupted. And, well, take a guess how the rest of their night went.

The two women heard the door open and rushed to see who it was, "Lucas, you're here early!"

"Well, I do live here. And I thought I could help with the finishing touches," Lucas smiled.

"Great idea, thank you, Lucas," Max pecked him on the lips and gave him a big vase, "Now, go put those flowers in there and make sure none of them are dead," She said, gesturing to some poppies.

"Aye aye captain."

Time flew by and soon there were more knocks on the door, "Mike, come in!" El heard Max say.

"I thought you said he couldn't make it," El whisper shouted.

"Last minute schedule change," Lucas responded as Mike stepped through into the dining room where the last touches were being made.

"Hey, El. I'm so excited to meet... eh," He trailed off.

"Jason. His name is Jason," She said, a little too brightly.

The other guests arrived one by one, and they were all waiting on Jason to start eating. An awkward silence hung heavy in the room when Dustin said, "So, is he gonna show?"

Max kicked him under the table as El got up from her seat, "I'm gonna call him."

How embarrassing was this? She marched over to the phone, her tall heels clicking on the hardwood floor. First, she dialed the number to her house. No answer. Then she tried his car phone, "Jason Aviles." He said, his voice gruff and agitated. Why did he always have to be agitated?

"Where are you?" She ground her teeth. Tonight was not the night for his bullshit.

"Oh hey, babe. I just left the house. Should be there in about fifteen minutes." El took a deep breath. They would deal with this in private.

"Okay, just get here as fast as you can. We're all waiting."

He hung up without answering and she walked back to the table, "He said he'd be here in like 15 minutes, and I'm so sorry for the delay. Probably just a long day at work."

"Yeah, I bet," Will muttered.

The tension in the air was rising and Max desperately needed to break it. She felt so stupid for wanting this dinner. El obviously didn't want it, so why did she even set it up? She just wanted to finally meet the man her best friend had been dating for three years, and she wanted it to be amazing. She wanted to impress, but maybe she went a little overboard. I mean a whole ass dinner, isn't that a little much? Finally, a knock on the door, "Oh good, he's here."

El got up to go answer the door, but Max stopped her, "Here, let me. It's my home after all."

"Yes, but I need to have a discussion with him."

"Just let me introduce myself, it would be rude for me to let my guest answer the door," Max retorted.

"Max, I really need to talk to him."

"For fuck's sake, both of you go," Dustin said rather loudly.

Max and El walked to the door and Jason walked in, "Hey, doll." He said and kissed El lightly on the cheek.

Max's eyes widened at the sight of him. He had to be at least 28, "El! How old is he?" Max whispered.

"32," She said back.

"He already has grey hair!"

"Just leave it," She snipped.

Max looked down, something was off. El never acted like this. She already didn't like this Jason guy. They entered the kitchen and El could see everyone's eyes widen, "Jason, please sit. Everyone, this is Jason. Jason this is, Max, Lucas, Will, Dustin, and Mike."

"Nice to meet you," Jason said quietly.

Then the small talk ensued. Questions such as, what do you do? When did you and El meet? How long have you been together? El could finally relax. Everything was going great, and despite the hiccup at the very beginning, they all seemed to like him well enough. And who cares if they think he's too old, they're not the ones who are dating him. Then Jason picked up the wine bottle, "Erm, Jason, darling. Maybe no wine tonight?"

"Oh come on baby, one glass," He urged.

"I don't think it's a good idea," The only thing El was thinking was please please don't resist. The last thing she needed was him getting drunk.

Jason shook his head and began pouring, "Jason, I'm serious. Please don't drink tonight." She said, raising her voice.

"You know what, I'm gonna do whatever the fuck I want to. So shut the fuck up. I'm just trying to have some fun with your weirdo friends and you're just being a bitch about it!" He yelled.

"Please don't call my friends that. I just don't want you to get drunk and relapse. We can talk about this when we get home. Just don't drink," She begged.

With that, he picked up the bottle of wine and stomped out of the

room. The door slammed shut and El winced. She knew she was gonna get it when she got home. She plopped down in the chair and buried her face in her hands, "Hey, are you okay?" She heard a soft voice ask. She looked up and inches from her face were big, brown eyes. Brows creased with worry, he asked again, "Are you okay?"

"Yeah I'm fine," She answered quietly, "He's usually not like that. Thanks though, Mike." His pink lips curved up in a pitying smile, and as he nodded his curly hair bobbed up and down. He wiped his pale, freckle dotted face and stood up straight.

"If you need a place to stay tonight, our home is open," Lucas offered.

"No thanks. I should go. Make sure he got home safe, you know?"

El hated being pitied, but there wasn't much she could do about it. She glanced around the room quickly, her eyes pleading for someone to see what was really happening. She wished with all of her heart that someone wouldn't let her go. If she was being honest, she was scared for her life. She knew one day he would take it too far and cause permanent damage to her, but for the life of it she couldn't find the courage to leave him. In plus, she loved him.

She thanked them all for coming and walked out the door.

Driving home was peaceful. The only peace she had gotten in a long time. She passed a little shop titled "Mrs. Canning's Antiques" where she had once bought a tiny Christmas tree with Mike. That year they were short on money and couldn't afford a real tree, so he offered to



take her to get a small one. They decorated it that night with little ornaments El had made out of cotton balls. It sat in their entry window for three years until Will accidentally broke it. El had spent all night trying to fix it, but it was beyond repair. Mike had bought another one, but it never caught on. It was probably somewhere in storage now.

She pulled up to the apartment building and took the longest way to their place. She finally did reach their door though and braced herself for the beating. She took a deep breath and went inside. It was strangely quiet. She walked around the little apartment and called Jason's name. No answer. She was starting to worry when something, rather someone, smashed into her. She let out a small scream and he pushed her up against the wall and grabbed her throat, cutting off her air supply, "Jason." She choked out.

"How dare you make a fool of me like you did," He said, pushing harder on her neck.

"I'm sorry," She gasped. He finally let off her and they, of course, did the deed, the devil's tango, if you may.

She laid in bed and looked up to the ceiling. If she squinted hard enough, she could just see a dog up in the crown molding. She had always wanted a dog, but Jason didn't like them. She fell asleep thinking of her would-be dog and her would-be loving husband and her would-be kids. Her would-be life that she took for granted. Her would-be life she always thought she'd have with him. Her would-be happiness.

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**woman**

**harry styles**

## 6. I THINK

*Wasted, boy, I need your attention*

*I'm off balance, I need some fixin'*

*I'm your puppet,*

*you are Jim Henson*

---

August 16, 1992

Indianapolis, Indiana

11:23 am

The small white stick clinked to the floor as El's eyes filled with tears. *This isn't real, this isn't real* . How could it be real? They had been safe. They had done everything they were supposed to do.

*Deep breaths* , she told herself. Everything will be okay. Sure, having a baby changes everything about life. And you have to care for another human being. And this particular baby is Jason's, which isn't ideal. And, yeah, she wasn't even sure she wanted kids. *Oh god, this isn't good.*

She picked up the pregnancy test from the pink linoleum floor and walked to where Jason was, unknowingly, watching the Hoosiers lose, "Wow they really suck this year." He said, not taking his eyes off the TV. El slightly smiled and walked over to his chair. Her heart was beating in her throat as she nervously rubbed the soft fabric on

her pants.

“Yeah. So, I need to tell you something.” Jason finally tore his eyes away from the television. He had the kind of look on his face that said *well, what are you waiting for* ?

“So, what is it?”

"Well, I haven't gotten my period in a while-

"Gross, I don't want to hear about that!"

"Just listen. I haven't gotten my period in a while and my stomach has been upset lately. So, I took a pregnancy test and it came out positive. We're gonna have a baby," She said, pulling the test out of her pocket to show him.

His face changed from frustrated anticipation to terror in the blink of an eye, "I thought you were on the pill?"

“I am. I don’t know. Maybe I forgot to take it.”

“Well, that’s your fault. I don’t want to be punished because you were careless,” He said, standing up.

“Listen. I don’t want this either but now there’s nothing we can do about it.”

He stepped toward her. She couldn’t read the expression on his face and she was worried he would explode. “You could get an abortion.”

She was shocked. Whatever she thought he was going to do or say, it wasn’t that, “What? I’m not getting an abortion.”

“Why not?”

“B-because-” She sputtered, not being able to find the right words.

“B-because you don’t want to make any sacrifice for this relationship!” He stormed into their small washroom and took the pill case that stored her birth control out of the beat-up drawer. “You see what this is, Jane? This is what grownups take so they don’t have to throw away their goddamn lives! But you’re not a grownup, are you Jane? You’re just a scared little girl that got herself in deeper than she could handle. And now you’re going to pay!” He threw the container on the ground and it busted open, causing the pills to spill everywhere. “Doesn’t matter. You won’t need them anymore.”

She tried to hold her tears back so that she could maintain any dignity she had left, but her efforts were to no avail. “Aww, you gonna cry? I’ll give you something to goddamn cry about,” A clean wack to the stomach and she was on the ground.

“What’s wrong with you?” She gasped as she slinked into the corner of the room.

“This way we won’t have to pay for planned parenthood to do it,” He said, with a grim smirk on his lips. Another punch, “You know, Jane, if you had just gone with my original plan none of this would happen-” another punch “-but no, you had to stand up to big, mean Jason. Look how far that got you!” Another punch.

“STOP! STOP! STOP! Please stop,” She pleaded.

“Stop what? This?” Another punch. “Or this?” A kick.

She could feel her whole body crying out for an end that wasn’t in sight. He kicked her again, harder this time. The toe of his boot driving into the softest part of her stomach. Where that thing was growing in her. She curled herself into a ball, trying to protect that little piece of life. He bent down beside her and pried her knees away from her face until she was fully exposed, then BAM! Another kick. She rolled over on her stomach and picked her self up with her hands. She stood leaning against the counter, staring into the face of a man she once thought she loved. Not a man, but a monster. She had spent her whole life fighting away monsters, and here was the scariest one yet. Standing in front of her with a twisted smile, prepared to kill their unborn baby. Her stomach hurt worse than she thought was possible, and she was pretty sure if she spoke she would vomit, but she managed to say what she needed to say, “Get out.” This was said quietly but firmly, taking Jason back a little.

“You can’t do that,” He stepped toward her, but for the first time in a long time, she didn’t shrink away.

“You heard me. Get the hell out of my apartment.”

“Fine, if that’s what you want. You’ll never see me again, though. Have fun raising a baby alone, Jane. When your dad finds out you got knocked up and abandoned he won’t help you. Neither will you fag of a brother or your bitchboy Mike. You’re on your own.” He got up and walked to the door.

She thought for a second and sighed, “Wait, Jason. Come back.” He smirked and sauntered his way back to where she was still leaned against the counter.

“I knew you needed me. You always come crawling b-” His sentence was cut off by a sharp knee to the testicles.

“Now you may leave,” She said. She watched him stumble to the door and out of it. There it was. The end.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

so i’m posting once a week instead of biweekly now! we might fall a bit behind schedule, but i really wanted to give you guys more. i do have one request though, please stop asking when el and jason are going to break up and mike and el are going to get together. i don’t know if this was clear (i mean it’s in the tags) but this book is a SLOW BURN. that means there will be pining, there will be long lost looks, there will be angst. i love all the support, and i promise it will happen, but please just have patience. i can’t spoil the whole book lol, and if slow burn isn’t your thing you probably won’t like this book very

much. i'm sorry if ya'll thought this was something that it wasn't, but it is getting exhausting when every time i come on here i have comments asked when they're getting back together. it makes me feel like you guys don't like what i'm doing, so please have grace. i promise it'll all work out in the end.



## 7. cardigan

Summary for the Chapter:

don't yell at me

*I knew I'd curse you for the longest time*

*Chasin' shadows in the grocery line*

*I knew you'd miss me once the thrill expired*

*And you'd be standing in my front porch light*

---

August 19, 1992

Hawkins, Indian

1:17 pm

El had felt good when she kicked Jason out. She felt like she was finally in control. But now, all she could do was curse herself at how stupid she had been. She was still pregnant, she went and checked, and now the father of her baby was gone. It had been three days and she hadn't told anyone, about the pregnancy or the breakup, and it was killing her.

Max's giggle brought El back to reality, "El, did Mike ever say that kind of stuff to you?" Her voice laced with teasing.

El was completely lost, "Um, yep." She hoped her friends didn't see through her fake smile and confused eyes.

All of their mouths fell open as Mike tried to defend himself, “No no no no. What I said was strictly for a one night stand. I would never say that to anyone I actually cared about.”

*Oh god, they're talking about sex stuff.* El could feel her face burning at this realization and stuttered, “O-oh that’s, that’s not what I meant.”

“Then what did you mean?” Dustin looked down at her playfully.

“I-I just, I wasn’t. I just meant that um we-” She looked over at Mike with his eyebrows furrowed and a slight smile on his lips.

“Were you even listening?” He saved her.

“You caught me,” She exhaled in relief and nervously giggled, “I was off in dreamland.”

They all laughed, their shrills filling the small diner. Joy radiated from where their group was and El looked out at her friends. They seemed to be enjoying life to the greatest of their abilities. This was supposed to be a happy moment overflowing with pleasure and amusement, but to her, it felt like she was looking at a movie. A movie starring all of her childhood friends where they moved and grew and changed and had a happy life. And there she was, stuck in the theatre of her own story, watching on with a sad sort of completeness. It wasn’t a bad or ugly feeling, although she was quite sure she was about to burst into tears. It was more of the feeling you get when you finish a really good book or show and you sit there for a second taking everything in and not quite knowing what to do next. Her mind was blank as she sat at that small checkered table,

observing but not really listening. She saw that Dustin had cracked another joke, but if someone had asked her what he had said she wouldn't have been able to say. She also noticed a certain pair of brown eyes focused on her. She and Mike made eye contact for a millisecond and she quickly looked away. She felt embarrassed even though he was the one staring. Yes, she definitely was going to cry.

She stood up abruptly, giving everyone a start, "Um, I have to go to the bathroom."

The bathroom was quiet and cold. She sat on the counter and lit a cigarette, tears rolling silently down her cheeks. *Why am I crying?* She asked herself. Nothing had happened that should stimulate such a response. Pregnancy is a bitch.

She sat there for a couple of minutes, her tears slowed and she was content on enjoying this cigarette, even though it was killing her and her baby now. *Old habits die hard, I guess.*

There was a soft rap at the door, and she got up and opened it. Mike was standing in the doorway, barely two inches from her face. She was startled and fell backward hitting the trashcan and knocking it over.

"Oh! Are you okay?" He asked worriedly.

She got up, her face flushed in embarrassment, "Yes, yes, I'm alright."

His eyes flashed to the cigarette, "I didn't know you smoked."

“Yeah, well, there’s a lot of things you don’t know about me,” She dropped the tube of cancer to the floor and stepped on it, leaving a black mark on the dirty, blue tile.

“What’s been up with you? You’ve seemed like a different person lately.”

She saw his eyes scan her body and felt like he was looking through her. His gaze so intense on nothing, it unnerved her. What was he even looking at? He wasn’t looking at her face, or her tits, or the ground. He was looking straight into her and out the other side like he knew something that even she didn’t know. She was rattled by his question, which did nothing to help the nervous pit in her stomach. She felt a knot in her throat and knew that this was probably one of her more pathetic moments. Here she was, standing in a shitty diner bathroom, watching her ex-boyfriend stare not at her, but through her, pregnant, the toe of her clean, white shoe still smashed over the remains of her cigarette, and ready to cry at almost anything.

Why was he even so sure she was being strange? The last time they had engaged in a real conversation was four years ago. It filled her with rage that he had so knowingly made that statement about her *and been right*.

God, she needed to see a therapist.

She felt extremely overwhelmed and she noticed that they had been standing in complete silence for a socially unacceptable amount of time. She was about to speak when he looked at his feet and asked something that she was in no way prepared for, “Off in dreamland

again?”

The twinkle in his eye is what pushed her over the edge. That glint that she had fallen in love with when she was only twelve. One that faded with time, but would always make an appearance when he joked around. She knew she had to say something now or she would start crying and he would think she was vapid and perhaps on her period. She knew she had to say something, but she didn't quite know what, “I'm pregnant.”

The twinkle disappeared.

“What?”

“Um, yeah I'm... pregnant,” She felt the knot in her throat grow, “And Jason is gone, and- and I don't know what to do. I'm- I'm just so scared.”

There it was. The first time since she was probably 15 where she was able to admit she was scared. In her mind scared was always a synonym for weak, and weak was something she refused to be. It surprised her a little that she was able to admit it so easily.

“Who all knows?”

“No one knows,” her voice was so very wobbly now, teetering on the edge of a great precipice. Taunting her. Saying, *“Oh look, Jane. Will I fall off the side? Oop- not this time... but maybe next time. I surely won't*

*let you save your dignity you silly whore. You silly, silly slut. Funny you should think you had any dignity in the first place. Oh and here I go, tumbling over the edge. This is what you deserve, Jane."*

She let out a long and retched sob, finally letting the dam break fully. She looked down at her feet, choking on her tears, and when she looked up, mere milliseconds later, he was standing at her side instead of pressed against the door. His arms wrapped around her, holding her in a way she didn't know she needed to be held. She cried into his chest, wetting his shirt. It embarrassed her, but this was something she had to do. His hands stroking her hair seared into her scalp, thawing what had been frozen for so many years, "Hey, hey, it's going to be okay. It's going to be okay."

His eyes were fire. She had never noticed how they had sprinkles of lighter brown in them. They looked like they were filled with stars. Her crying slowed as she looked into those eyes. She was absorbed by their beauty, melting into every glint and color. They stared at each other for a long time, Mike still holding her tight. She could feel his erratic heartbeat under his thin, striped shirt. She wondered if he could feel hers.

Before she knew what was happening, he took her face in his strong hands and kissed her.

It was slow and soft. A deep, passionate kiss, but with no heat. This wasn't a kiss of fever and horniness, this was a kiss of knowing. Knowing that this is where you belong. Knowing that this is home.

Then she realized what they were doing.

She pulled away quickly looking down at herself. She saw that her shirt had somehow gotten untucked from her skirt during the endeavor and swiftly fixed it. Letting out a deep breath, she looked up at him, "Listen, Mike-

"No, it's okay. I understand. You have some intense shit going on," He cut her off, "I just want you to know that I'm here for you. If you ever need to talk or just sit and cry, I'll be there."

He smiled a sad little smile and got up to leave the restroom. El followed quickly behind him, feeling like shit.

When they got to the table the other's looked up expectantly at them, "I'm sorry guys, I need to go. I had a fun time, but I have to study." El said in her best apologetic voice.

"Oh, okay. Well, it was really great hanging out. I'll see you soon?" El could read the worry on Max's face and felt a pang of guilt in her stomach. She really wasn't a very good person.

"Yeah, I'll see you soon."

They watched her walk quickly out of the restaurant, and when she was gone they turned to Mike. Their inquisitive eyes burned into him and he knew what they wanted to hear, "Nothing happened in there. She just needed some space."

"You guys were in there for a while," Lucas smirked and waggled his

eyebrows.

“Really guys, nothing happened.”

---

August 19, 1992

Indianapolis, Indiana

10:49 pm

El had chosen to try not to think of the kiss and instead think of what she was going to do about the whole single mother situation.

That was easier said than done

The warmth of his lips and strength of his hands against her cheeks filled her mind. She still felt his tongue dancing around in her mouth. She had forgotten what he tasted like, but as soon as his lips connected with hers, it all came flooding back. The taste of mint from his toothpaste, the coffee because he never went a day without at least two cups, the chapstick because he always licked his lips when he was nervous.

She shifted uncomfortably in her seat, feeling the tingling between her legs grow. *Stop it.* She cursed herself. She looked down at the piece of paper on her desk. She needed to study. *Okay, what does Absolute Refractory Period mean? It means... oh what does it mean? Something about neurons and something being completed.*



She let out a heavy sigh. It was obvious she was not going to get any work done tonight. She rose from her seat and walked over to her bed. The soft mattress under her back felt like a heavenly relief after the day she had. Her eyes closed and she let herself be absorbed with thoughts of Mike. His hands sliding down her back, his lips on her jaw, his tongue exploring her mouth. The tingling between her legs grew. Her hand slid down her breast all the way to the waistband of her pajama pants. She lifted the fabric and- BANG BANG BANG!!

Her eyes shot open and she leaped out of her bed. She rushed to her front door and swung it open. A tall, dark-haired man she knew very well stood at the door, flowers in hand. She gasped, not knowing how to react to this unexpected visit. He had a familiar smile on his lips and she realized just how much she missed him.

“Jason, what are you doing here?”

“I wanted to talk. Can I come in?” He held out the flowers to her with a soft and caring look on his face.

“Yes. Come in.”

—

cardigan

taylor swift

## 8. sign of the times

*you can't bribe the door on the way to the sky*

*you look pretty good down here*

*but you ain't really good*

august 20, 1992

hawkins, indiana

5:02 am

el had always been a morning person, loving the quiet tranquility of it all. how, if you get up early enough, the only thing awake is you. she loved getting to watch the sun awake from its slumber, calling to life everyone with it. she loved hearing the birds come to life with cool melodies. she loved the pureness of a new day.

today was different, though.

when she awoke, all she wanted to do was go back to sleep. she wasn't tired, she just didn't want to face the reality of what she'd done quite yet. el's mind was screaming as she laid against jason's warm, sticky body. why had she been so stupid? why had she let him into her home? into her bed? into her heart once again?

the memories of the night prior flooded her mind. she was so emotionally exhausted that she supposed she would have said yes to anything. he invited himself to her house and manipulated her into giving herself to him. she was resentful at him and angry with herself, "jane." he'd said, "don't you think it's the best plan for the baby that i'm around. i mean, you know what it's like to grow up without a parent. you of all people should know that this is the best

option.”

she had agreed and he had kissed her. she meant to fight it, but there was something about the *familiarity* of it that drew her in. it wasn't the same way she felt when she and mike kissed, like coming home. it felt like comfort food. like stuffing yourself until you puke just because that's what you've always done.

she sighed and slowly got up, so as not to wake him.

dustin was hosting a gathering at his apartment in a couple of days, so that's what she chose to focus on. she was happy she had reconnected with them after not talking. after they all went to college, they sort of drifted away, but since max and lucas's wedding, they were closer than ever. she did enjoy being around them, but it made her guilty. when they didn't talk, she had all of her time to give to jason, but now that she was spending more time with her friends, she was scared that jason would get upset about it. he got upset about almost everything.

he had once told her when they first started dating, that he didn't want her socializing with her male coworkers because he didn't want her to be tempted to cheat. their relationship was new, and she wanted to make him happy, so she agreed. it was difficult not being able to have relationships with the people she saw every single day, but she told herself that if it made jason happy it was the right thing.

she was fired from that job.

the next job she had, she thought it would be different because they had been dating longer and had built up trust. they went to an office

party together and jason saw her talking to a coworker named caleb. he slapped her twice.

she sometimes wondered if maybe he was wrong, but just having the thought of opposing him made her flinch.

she had work that day, so she rose from her chair and quietly walked to her room to get dressed. she tried to stay as silent as possible, she wanted to be able to leave before jason awoke, but as she slid open the drawer of her dresser, the bed creaked behind her. she winced and turned around, "hey."

"hey," he said, still not entirely awake.

"so, i have to go to work today. i need to be there at eight, so um yeah..."

"you want me to leave?" jason sat up in bed and gave her a look that she had not missed in the slightest.

"it's just, it's gonna be a long day today, and-"

"no, i get it," he cut her off, "i'll go if that's what you want."

el let out a sigh and thanked him. he'd never said "if that's what you want" before. maybe being with him again wasn't going to be so bad. she slid a shirt on and bent down to grab her shoes. when she was

bent over, a sharp pain seized in her backside, “oh!” she exclaimed. he had slapped her butt.

---

august 23, 1992

hawkins, indiana

7:46 pm

mike was staring at el much like how someone would not stare at a dead animal on the side of the road. he'd been examining her for quite some time, ever since they arrived at dustin's small apartment, which was about two hours ago.

the faux leather chair he was sitting on made it rather easy to watch her from across the room. he was angled so that she was turned away from him, but he could still see her face, which was the ideal position of someone who wanted to observe without being noticed.

he normally wouldn't partake in such unorthodox behavior as stalking a woman, but she was acting differently. he had noticed it right away when he walked into the stuffy living room. she was perched on the couch he highly suspected dustin had stolen. she looked as if she would like it better to simply turn into a pile of human goop, much like the stuff they encountered the summer of 1985, than to be sitting there listening to Max gush about married life. granted, there were a lot of things he'd do before listen to Max talk about how magnificent it was to wake up next to someone and know that they'd be there tomorrow to wake up to as well.

“so, how are you and jason?” max asked el. mike’s eyes widened. he thought after the incident between el and him, she would've told max about the breakup.

“yeah, um, we’re good. we’re getting married.”

“what!?” mike blurted out. all eyes turned to him and his skin burned from embarrassment and anger. a couple of days ago they were broken up, but now they were going to make their relationship forever? he didn’t understand.

“yep. he -um- asked me yesterday.” she wore a smile mike would only be able to describe as despondent.

“well... um... i’m happy for you,” Max said in a tone that told everyone she was definitely not.

---

august 23, 1992

hawkins, indiana

11:17 pm

the cool bench beneath el was a stark contrast from the near sweltering heat in the air. dustin’s apartment was stuffy and unpleasant, and she had started to feel quite nauseous, so she excused herself outside.

the quiet around her was something she hadn't experienced for some time. everything had been so busy and stressful lately, she'd forgotten what peace felt like. the warm air on her cheeks were like soft kisses from her mother, but the heat was almost unbearable. her sweat dripped down her face in large drops, landing on her thighs in a pool of hot, salty water.

she stood up from the ever warming bench and grimaced from the sight of her leg imprints on the now slick metal. jason would call her disgusting and she would agree with him. the dead grass crunched under the soles of her yellowing tennis shoes as she walked to the side of the building. the bile that was always resting at the bottom of her throat was awake and threatening to make an appearance, so she had the sense to go to a semi-private area just in case her dinner did decide it wanted to see the outside world once again.

blood rushed to her head as she bent over to vomit. the food came up and the sight of it made her want to upchuck again. she wiped her mouth and stood up straight, now seeing that she had a visitor. startled, she stepped backward into the pile of sin on the ground, "oh no! gross!"

mike stared at her, his brows furrowed in a way that would have been unattractive on anyone else, "so, you and jason are getting married, huh?"

"do we really have to talk about that?" she asked, preoccupied with getting the vomit off her shoes.

"yes. three days ago you were broken up, now you're getting

married? what's going on, jane?"

"nothing is going on. he asked me to marry him and i said yes. that's it, mike."

her eyes said she was telling the truth, but she had always been a good liar, "you can talk to me. i know it's kind of weird now, but i still care about you, jane. i just want-"

"stop calling me that!" her voice was loud and sharp in an unfamiliar way and mike stepped back, obviously surprised.

"what?" his words were timid; something she wasn't used to.

"i'm sorry, i just hate it when people call me jane. and fine, i don't really want to marry him."

"why not?"

"i need to get married before i have the baby. i mean what will people say if i'm a single mom? what would hop say?" her voice was weak, and mike didn't like that. she was *never* weak.

"your dad is still going to love you, el. we all are."



“i don’t even know if he loves me now. he has lung cancer, you know. he’s real sick with lung cancer, but i never see him because i just can’t stand to be around him. i only- i only smoke the goddamn cigarettes because the smoke reminds me of him. not even just him, it reminds me of hanging out in the cabin together when i was a kid and feeling like we were the only two people in the entire world. it reminds me of having a real dad, which i never thought i would have. it reminds me of that pure kind of love that you never think will go away, but it does.”

“el-“

“i mean i’m the biggest fucking disappointment anyone could ask for. fuck, i mean i’m gonna drop out of college because i don’t have any money. i’m marrying a man i don’t even know, just because i got knocked up. i can’t even look at you without- without. jesus christ, mike. i can’t even look at you without falling in love all over again,” tears ruptured from her eyes, and mike stepped forward to embrace her.

she melted into him, and he into her. for those few seconds it was just them, and it was like they were 13 again. just the two of them. just mike and eleven.

---

sign of the times

harry styles

## 9. BOY IS A GUN\*

*oh, you passive-aggressive?*

*oh, you fakin' you're mad?*

*oh, you wanna go home?*

*cool, you better call you a cab*

september 10, 1992

hawkins, indiana

6:14 pm

the car rumbled up onto the gravel driveway of the small restaurant. the pellets of rocks flung up on the bottom of the sleek, black car, making sounds like hail falling to the ground in the middle of winter.

el stepped out of the car, her red heels making it hard to walk on the uneven ground, "need some help?" jason reached for her as she stumbled.

"no, i'm okay. thanks, though."

"of course. that's what i'm here for. what's wrong?" she had stopped walking, leaving him to go on by himself.

"nothing. nothing, everything's great," el smiled to herself. for once she knew he'd actually meant it when he asked her if everything

was okay. he was finally getting back to himself. he was finally getting back to the man she fell in love with.

they walked together in a peaceful silence until they reached the red doors of the restaurant. peaceful was something el had forgotten about. there was always a tension in the air with jason, but ever since they'd gotten engaged he had become more like himself. not the monster that overtook him when he was upset. it relieved el, she thought she could really have a normal life now. she would get married and have a baby and live to be old with jason and it would be perfect. they would be happy, finally.

the restaurant was loud and overwhelming. they rushed to their seats quickly. jason hustled her along, knowing she didn't like loud noises. at last they reached the safety of the private room max had rented out.

"happy birthday, lucas!" el exclaimed.

"thanks, " lucas laughed and invited her to sit next to him. she ended up sandwiched in between lucas and mike with jason sitting directly in front of her. the table was far too small of the the seven of them, and max apologized profusely for this. "i didn't realize that jason was coming and i didn't know the tables were so small here. i'm really sorry, guys."

"hey, it's okay max. so, we're a little cramped, it builds character," mike laughed, trying to comfort her.

"i bet you like being so close to everyone , huh mike?" jason said, in

an accusatory tone.

"what does that mean?" mike asked, confused.

"it means you don't know how to keep your hands to yourself, buddy."

mike looked around, confused "i seriously don't know what you're talking about, man." he laughed nervously.

"jason, please," el whispered. she was already tired of this, and she didn't have the energy to deal with him being dramatic.

"jane, just shut up. and i'm talking about how you two kissed, *man*, " he said, gesturing to mike and el.

"don't talk to me like that," el said over everyone's gasps.

"what did you just say to me?"

"i said don't fucking talk to me like that!" she suddenly stood from her chair, knocking it to the ground, "i thought that we could be normal! that you could actually pretend to care about me! but you don't. you never will! the only reason you got in a relationship with me is because i'm young and i put up with all your bullshit! well, not anymore, asshole!"

“you are so STUPID! i can’t believe i have to spend the rest of my life with you! you- you- you BITCH! don’t you understand that you’re never going to get any better than this? you’re not worth any more than this! you’re not even worth me! i hate everything about you! i hate how you ask questions about literally everything, i hate how you never show interest in the stuff that i do, i especially hate how you pretend THIS asshole is just your friend. he’s obviously more and if you weren’t pregnant i’d fucking kill the both of you!”

a hush fell over the room. it felt like everyone was holding their breath until will broke the silence, “you’re pregnant?”

“yes. i am. and i’m leaving.” she reached over the table and picked up the keys from in front of jason.

“hey, that’s my car!”

“call a cab!”

“BITCH!” he screamed. “don’t expect me to come back home!”

at that, el turned around, “good. that’s the last thing i want, for you to come home. i don’t need you there, no one needs you at all. so just go to a hotel, and never talk to me again.”

what happened next happened so fast, no one there could have

stopped it. first jason was standing at the table, then a shattered plate was on the floor and el was pressed up against the wall, jason holding the knife from his silverware set to her stomach, “you’re gonna regret saying that.”

“what are you going to do? you’re insane! we’re in a goddamn restaurant!” el laughed.

“shut the hell up-“ he was quickly cut off by someone ramming into him.

the two bodies fell to the ground and the one and only will byers sat on top of the man who was a foot taller than him and weighed 100 more pounds and was beating the shit out of him. the world stood still as will broke a nose and knocked out teeth. his fists were bloody, and he couldn’t tell whose blood it was. no one pulled him off and he only ceased when jason was laying unconscious.

will stood up and wiped the blood off his hands, “um, mike, will you call 911?”

“yes, of course. uh, what should i tell them?”

“tell them there’s an asshole here who’s gonna die soon if no one comes, but maybe don’t send anyone because this particular asshole likes to beat up pregnant women. and el, come on. you’re staying with me in case this piece of shit decides to visit your apartment after he gets out of the hospital. you can go back once i get someone to change the locks. let’s go”

“oh, uh- o-okay.”

“oh, and lucas?”

“yeah?” lucas said, shell shocked.

“sorry for ruining your birthday.”

—

**BOY IS A GUN\***

**Tyler, the Creator**

## 10. red light

### Notes for the Chapter:

so this'll be the last chapter for a while. i'm not going to update again until March 7. i'm sorry for the inconvenience, but there's a lot of stuff going on in my life right now, and i need to focus on my health and the health of my loved ones. i hope you understand.

*You gotta love me 'cause now you have to*

*And if you don't, well I might just have to kill you*

*You can't forget me, I wouldn't let you*

*'Cause if you did I would run into the deep blue*

September 16, 1992

Hawkins, Indiana

11:50 am

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jason's heavy boots made an unpleasant thump against the cement parking lot.

*thump. thump. thump.* the noise—if anyone was around to hear it—would have sparked anxiety. it said *something bad is going to happen! go! leave! you don't want to be around for this one, folks.* it foreboded hurt and fear. it was what evil would sound like if it decided to reside in a school parking lot, which it did that day.



evil followed Jason wherever he went. you may say, “but author, this man who was abused as a child and doesn’t know what a healthy relationship should look like can’t be evil. he’s only ever hit one woman. joseph Stalin was evil and he killed millions. how can you say that they are the same?”

to that, I tell you, evil isn’t one, set thing. yes, evil is Stalin murdering millions of innocent people, but evil is also a mother doing nothing while her children are abused. evil is al-Qaeda crashing two planes into the twin towers, but it is also a teenager luring neighborhood pets to the woods solely with the intention of killing them. evil is bringing suffering to others for no other reason than to see them in pain.

the line between good and evil is fuzzy. is it evil to steal? it is if it’s from orphans or immigrants, but go ahead and take all you want from a drug addict or a rich person. is it evil to kill? of course, it is if you’re killing a single mother, but you’re doing the world a favor if you take the life of a felon.

we see evil in the context of the person that was the victim of the crime. we say it isn’t evil to kill a rapist, not because we understand death or the concept of evil, but because he was a rapist. is it evil to manipulate a woman into sleeping with you? some would say no, she made the decision to sleep with you, and therefore the sex was consensual and the action was not evil.

looking at the victim and determining the severity of the crime based on what you find is evil in itself. we cannot see who this victim is in their entirety, so we must look at the perpetrator.

when determining if an act was evil or not we must ask one simple question: did they mean to cause harm for no other reason than to benefit themselves?

we, as humans, try to see things as simple as possible. we see a murder and we see evil as one. the question I posed at the beginning, how can Stalin, a radical racist and terrorist, and Jason, an abuser of one adult, both be evil? to answer this we must ask our key question. did Stalin mean to cause harm for no other reason than to benefit himself? the simple answer is yes. and did Jason mean to cause harm now for no other reason than to benefit himself? yes. unfortunately, yes he did.

the evil that had accompanied so many before had taken hold of him when he went to his apartment and found the locks changed. something had shifted in him that day, something irreversible. he went from bad to wicked. so wicked, he was willing—no looking—to kill.

thankfully the receptionist at the front desk of the school could feel the wickedness too, “can I help you?” she asked, stopping Jason from walking into the main part of the school.

“I’m here to see jane hopper. I’m her boyfriend,” he responded, with a false warmth.

“oh, i’m sorry jane is with a student right now, so i can’t let you go see her,” this was entirely untrue and the receptionist knew it. in fact, the woman had just spent lunch with el and knew for a fact that she was still outside, going over the procedure for handling children with disabilities.

“huh, i didn’t realize school counselors, especially at elementary schools, actually did anything.”

“well, she probably won’t be out for a while, so you might as well go. i’ll let her know you were here and i’m sure she’ll give you a call when she’s available.”

“alright, then. have a *great* day,” jason said in a strained tone. he wasn’t stupid and he knew when he was being lied to. he just needed to figure out a different way to get into the school.

he walked around the side of the building and found a door leading to the one of the hallways. he pulled on it but it was locked. he cursed and then an idea popped into his head. he had eaten lunch with el here before and he knew there were outside tables that people sometimes ate at. he would go over to where people were eating and the door would most likely be unlocked (it *was* lunch time) and he’d just walk right in. easy as that.

he rushed to the back of the building and saw something even better than he could’ve imagined. there, sitting at a bright blue table, eating an apple and flipping through a handbook, was el. he took note of how pretty she looked sitting there with the sun reflecting off of her auburn hair, making it look gold. it angered him that he wasn’t able to have something so beautiful.

he strode quickly over to her, “jason-“ she was barely able to let the word out before he slapped her smartly across the rosy cheek that was no longer his.

el looked at him, dumbstruck, “what are you doing here?” she asked in an incredulous tone.

jason, though, wasn’t interested in talking.

he struck her again and she fell to the ground. before she had the chance to even realize what was happening, he was sitting on top of her, her arms pinned under his legs so she couldn’t move.

the blows were hard and fast, just as always. she wasn’t making any noise, but he didn’t notice. her face was pummeled in and her whole body was bleeding. his full weight was on her torso and her wrists were bruised from where his knees pinned them down. he was completely oblivious to the world around him until he heard a small scream.

jason was very familiar with the screams of children, and he looked up quickly. the kid was already gone. the only thing jason saw was the tail of a crimson red shirt, the same shade as the blood that covered his hands.

that’s when he realized that jane was unconscious. her head moved in an inhuman way when he got off of her. it reminded him of when he was seven and he came home to find his cat on his bed. when he picked it up it’s head moved in the same way that jane’s did now. jerky and void of life. it was dead and there was a note next to it in manic writing that said “do your chores next time”. his father always had strange ways to convey a message.

he wasn't sure if *she* was dead now or not. he sure wasn't going to stick around to find out. he heard footsteps coming toward him quickly, and he ran. he ran away from jane and the school and the footsteps that were going to call the police.

he ran because he knew where he needed to be and he knew he needed to get there fast.

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the office was warm and mike's mind drifted from his work. it seemed like recently his mind was always drifting. and it always found its way to one thing. he thought about the dinner a couple nights before. how had jason known that he and el had kissed? she surly didn't tell him. maybe a lucky guess? and he had thrown a plate at her. why? what did that mean? he'd never seen anything like that before and he was deeply confused by it.

"mike?" joanna, the receptionist, called his name in her voice that always sounded like she was on the verge of tears. "there's a call for you on line two. from will byers."

he smiled weakly at her and picked up the too heavy phone, "hello?" his voice was tired and he wanted to sleep so he would stop thinking about her.

"mike! oh my god something horrible happened." will said urgently.

mike sat up, worried and no longer as tired, “what? is everything okay?” he was talking too loud and his boss glared at him. “will, what’s going on?” he whispered.

“it’s el. she’s in the hospital. she was outside eating lunch and this kid saw a man on top of her punching her and when a teacher got there he was gone and she was on the ground passed out,” he was rambling and mike didn’t know what to say to get him to stop.

“jason?” he asked, almost inaudibly.

“that’s what everyone’s thinking. hopper is like on a fucking man hunt right now, but no one knows where he is.”

“well, what should i do?”

“i don’t know,” will admitted. “she’s not allowed to have more than two visitors. she’s in really bad shape, she lost...” he took a shaky breath. “she lost the baby. so i guess just pray and keep a watch out.”

“she lost the baby?” mike asked. “what a-“ he clenched his teeth and lowered his voice, “fucking bastard. goddamn fucking monster.”

“i know. she hasn’t woken up yet, but i feel bad for whoever has to tell her.”

“that’s- that’s so horrible. sorry will, i have to go but call me if anything changes” mike was faintly aware of someone walking into

the office as he hung up, but paid no attention until his name was called.

his head shot up and he saw not a man, but a beast. the hellion barreled toward him with a crazed look in his eye. before he knew it he was on the ground with jason on top of him. the blows to his face were almost rhythmic, making a beat in his mind. it reminded him of *Every Breath You Take* by *The Police* .

that was the song he and el and danced to at the snowball all those years ago. whoever he was missing her, he would put on that song and pretend like she was there with him, swaying to the music. her beautiful smile directed at him. her arms around his neck, and her face inches away from his. he used to do that almost daily when he lived in boston, he missed her so much. the memories of her were always happy. they made him cry.

now, with el's ex boyfriend sitting on top of him, beating the shit out of him, he thought of that dance again. he thought of them recreating it at their wedding. he thought of showing it to their kids. and he thought of singing it to her as they got old together.

he drifted off to wherever you go when you're in between life and death. for mike it was dancing with el. oh what he would give to dance with her just one more time.

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**red light**

**the regrettes**

## 11. creve coeur 1

*sometimes you drive a car and lose control*

*into poles*

*hold me closely*

*i don't think you should love me*

*i always feel so lonely*

*knowing nothing will ever last forever*

September 30, 1992

Hawkins, Indiana

1:34 pm

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The hospital room was cold. Not brisk, not chilly, but freezing. The paper thin blanket doing little to ease the icy touch on el's skin. The cold was the first thing she noticed when she awoke. Her mind was foggy and her eyes refused to open, but the glacial temperature of the room pierced through any state of limbo she would've been in. she sensed warmth next to her, though. She needed that warmth, but she was frozen still. She wasn't sure what the source of the heat was, but she knew she needed to get to it.

With everything she had, she finally got her hand to move, to break out of the ice and into the world. She was vaguely aware that someone had said her name, but she was centering all of her focus on getting to the heat. All too quickly she felt a sweltering heat make



contact with her wrist. She was lurched out of the frigid world she was in by the touch of a hand.

The heat was almost unbearable. She had been frozen still for so long, she'd forgotten what warmth felt like, and it was jarring to encounter it so suddenly. Her eyes burst open, her body thawed all at once.

"You're awake," The voice radiated the same balmy comfort as the hand still resting on her wrist.

"Mike," Even his name sent tendrils of fire through her. "What are you doing here? What's going on?"

"You don't remember?" His brows furrowed and El saw a sadness in his eyes she'd become all too familiar with over the months they had reconnected. "El, Jason came back. He came to your school and-" he wasn't sure if he would be able to say the next part. "maybe i should go get a doctor."

He tried to get up, but was stopped by her icy fingers wrapped around his wrist, "No. Please, I don't want to hear it from some uncaring doctor. I want you to tell me."

"He hurt you, El." His voice was low with anger, "He came to the school and he hurt you really bad. Then he came to my work and he hurt me too. Not as bad, don't worry," he cut in, seeing the stress rise on her tired face, "I'm doing fine now, but you, you've been out for two weeks. We weren't sure if you were gonna make it at first. And El, I hate that I'm the one telling you this, but- but you lost it. You

lost the baby.”

“What?” when she spoke it sounded as if she was lost in a deep storm, choking on the rain and unable to see.

“I am so so sorry, Eleven.”

“I should’ve known this would happen. I guess deep down I did know. I guess that’s the reason I wasn’t too freaked out by the pregnancy, because I knew something like this would happen. It’s a horrible thing to say and I’m going to hell for it, but it’s true.”

Mike’s brow furrowed, “What do you mean you should’ve known?”

“I mean this wasn’t an isolated incident. The, uh, I don’t know what to call it. The hitting, I guess, was pretty much an everyday thing.”

“It’s called abuse,” He said coolly. Her words were void of meaning. He guessed it was a mixture of shock and anger, but his mind wouldn’t allow him to comprehend what she was saying. He might as well have been talking to a computer.

“No. No, it wasn’t abuse. He loved me.”

That broke through, “El, you’re not stupid. You know that’s not what love is.”

“Maybe it is,” she muttered, her eyes trained on her lap. “I mean that’s the way it’s been with everyone I’ve loved. It was that way with Papa, it was that way with Jason, hell even Hopper locked me up and isolated me from everyone for a year.”

“It wasn’t that way with me.”

“We were kids, Mike. We were stupid and we thought we were invincible. Of course it wasn’t like that with you because we were 15.”

“So that’s what you think of our relationship?” His voice was broken, “Just a couple of stupid kids who’s relationship was on a timer? You think that we weren’t in love? Because I loved you, El. I really did. And I thought you loved me back.”

“I don’t know what our relationship was, honestly. It was scary and I’ve never felt like the way I felt when I was with you before. I haven’t felt that way since. All I’m saying is that if this abuse, as you call it, keeps happening over and over again, it has to be my fault.”

“Did you know that people who were abused as kids are more likely to get into abusive relationships as adults? Did you also know that 1 in 3 women have experienced abuse from a partner and 4 million women suffer from abuse yearly? El, it’s not your fault.”

“I didn’t know that,” It was silent after that and their unsaid words hung in the air like how a brick hangs from a string.

After an uncomfortable amount of time stewing in the tension Mike asked, "Why didn't you leave him a long time ago?"

"I was scared."

"Scared of him?"

"Yes, but I was also scared that no one else would love me. That he was my last chance at happiness."

"That wasn't love."

"Then what is? I mean-" her breath hitched in her throat as she struggled not to cry, "-people keep saying they love me and then all it is is hurt. So maybe that's what love is."

"No. Love isn't hurt. Love is respect and kindness and joy. It's being there for someone even if it's hard. It's sticking up for the people you care about. It's putting other people before yourself. Love is what it feels like when Dustin cracks a stupid joke and you laugh even though it's not funny. You laugh because it's Dustin, or when Max is going on and on about how to do the perfect kick flip and Lucas is just admiring her because that's only something Max would do. Love makes you vulnerable and stupid and so so happy." He wiped his eyes, not wanting her to see he had started to cry.

“Everything in my life just feels like one big fuck up.”

“Me too. I wish we could just go back to when we were kids and were happy despite all the fucked up shit we went through.”

“Me too.”

It was quiet again, but this time it was peaceful. El was sad but it was a relieved kind of sadness. Mike was angry but it was an anger born out of love. They were both content to let those feelings reside, they were no longer festering. Mike was angry and El was sad and they were just that. Mike wasn't enraged. He wasn't going to bash skulls and kick ass. El wasn't miserable. She wasn't going to lay in bed and cry for the rest of her life. They were just content to be these lukewarm emotions and leave the extremes for another day.

“Well, I should probably get going,” He sighed and lifted himself out of his seat.

“Okay, I'll see you later.” She didn't want to see him go.

“Bye, El.” That conversation was incredibly muddled and confusing to him. He wanted to leave this cold, white room.

He walked out the door and as El watched him go, she started to realize she loved him.

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**creve coeur 1**

**hobo johnson**

**Notes for the Chapter:**

Hello i'm back. i'm sorry i've been gone so long. i feel i owe an explanation so here it is. i was recently diagnosed with a mental disability so i've been trying to work that out, one of my close friends started chemotherapy a couple of weeks ago, and school has been very stressful with exam prep and suck. i apologize for my absence, but there are a few things i needed to work out. due to all of this i will go back to updating every other week. i hope you understand and i'm glad to be back.

## 12. this is the end

hello readers. i fear this is the end of the story. i don't think i'll be able to continue writing for a multitude of reasons, but the main reason is i have no more motivation or time. it doesn't bring me joy to write or publish this story anymore. it is an unneeded stressor on me. there also hasn't been any new stranger things content for almost two years, so i have no inspiration. i'm always dissatisfied with the chapters i post and i feel, from the comments, that y'all don't like them either. so for those reasons and many more i won't be getting into, i am going to cease to upload. please be respectful of my decision. i don't want you guys to be totally left in the dark, so here is my outline for what was going to happen as the story progressed.

All the good girls go to hell- Max and Nancy find Jason and beat the shit out of him- 22 (all the good girls go to hell 'cause even god herself has enemies)

Heather- when el is about to share her feelings toward mike he reveals that he has a girlfriend-22 ( As she walks by

What a sight for sore eyes

Brighter than a blue sky

She's got you mesmerized

While I die )

fine line- Caroline finds out Mike and El used to date and Mike still has feelings for her.-22 (I don't want to fight you

And I don't wanna sleep in the dirt

We'll get the drinks in

So I'll get to thinking of her)

midnight love- Caroline breaks up with mike on Christmas Eve after he blows her off-23 (i can't be your midnight love when your silver is

my gold i can't be your second best close but not your favorite)

california friends- mike and el reveal their feelings to each other on Christmas-23 (If I think that you might like me

I might start getting lonely

When I think about how you can't hold me

Do you like the freckles on my face)

pumpkin- Mike and El make their relationship public on new years-23 ( We're cruising slowly, but we're moving fast

We've both decided to thank our past)

the ending-Mike finds out El now smokes and drinks a lot and they get in a fight about how she's not the same person as she used to be -23 ( I'ma hope for the best, but prepare for the worst

They're gonna focus on their hooks

And then say, "Fuck it" to the verse)

always- El makes it clear that she isn't looking for something serious and she can't get into a committed relationship because of Jason and Mike struggles coming to terms with that- 23 (you are taking me apart like bad glue on a get well card)

Champagne problems- Mike and El fight after El gets drunk and kisses someone else- 23 (you had a speech you're speechless love slipped beyond your reaches and i couldn't give a reason champagne problems)

911/Mr. Lonely- Mike gets possessive over El when she wants to go out with max- 24 ( I'm the loneliest man alive but I keep on dancing to throw them off I'm gonna run out of moves cause I can groove to the blues if you know any DJ's tell them to call me at 911)

Romeo and juliet- Mike realizes El isn't the same person she was in high school and they break up because the El that he loved wasn't the real el- 24 (a slow trainwreck you close your eyes but forever hear



the sound and boy that's tough cause that's the sound of people falling out of love)

"i wish we could go back in time so i could love you like i used to. so i could love you like ice loves to melt, like god loves the sinner, like heartbreak loves to find the people that deserve it least and destroy them. but we can't. instead why don't we just sit here and wait for the inevitable. we've got nothing better to do. we deserve a minute to grieve for what we threw away. just make the ending soft please."

falling- mike and el run into each other at a cafe 7 years later and talk. they both realize that the person wasn't the problem but the time period they were trying to have a relationship in. the book ends with mike asking el to "start over" with him and go on a date- 31 (you said you cared and you missed me too and i'm well aware i write too many songs about you)

**i really thank all of you for sticking around and reading when updates became unreliable. i apologize for not being able to finish this book. i hope you've enjoyed it so far. thank you.**